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## I. Background of Economic Alternatives for Political Resistance (AER)<sup>1</sup>

*Today we claim our identity, our history as Mayan women and we realize that our processes are nothing new. Rather, they are the recovery of our ancestral principles and practices, which can be summarized as a profound love for life.*

Women's Association for the Development of Sacatepéquez (AFEDES) is the result of becoming organized to improve living conditions. We organized ourselves in 1988 under the shadow of a cooperative located in Santiago Sacatepéquez, from which we received some measure of support to establish small projects for training and generating income. This support was a result of our status as wives and daughters of the cooperative's members.

Always mindful of known and perceived needs, we also pondered the problems of nutritional deficiency and food insecurity faced by our communities. As a result of data generated by an INCAP nutritional and socio-economic survey performed between 1986 and 1991—which showed that the levels of social inequality and malnutrition reached 81 % in women and children aged 1 to 9 in the very communities served by this cooperative—we set out to search for solutions. We developed and managed dairy farming projects to alleviate the problem of food insecurity. Later, we broadened the project and established revolving-fund microloans, which later turned into community banking accompanied by technical assistance, training, and technical and organizational education. AFEDES became a legal entity on August 3, 1994.

Many women were motivated to become involved in economic activities to support their families and improve their skills. There were changes in our activities; we established communal banks after observing that women's living conditions improved if they had access to resources and were thus able to drive productive projects. We decided to expand our work in urban areas to establish more women's groups. Urban mestizo women (*ladinas*) lacked interest and we encountered racist attitudes, as they were unwilling to become involved with indigenous women. In this way we ignited our discussion regarding our identity as indigenous women and what it means in our lives.

AFEDES began their community work by focusing on lending. We developed requirements and obligations that enabled women to have access to loans that they would be able to pay and established 33 groups.

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<sup>1</sup> This document was developed based on several sources: Standardization: "Recorriendo el caminos, hilamos nuestra historia y entretejemos resistencia" ("Walking the path we spin our history and weave resistance") (2011). Summary: History of AFEDES up to 2014. Sustainable Agriculture Proposal (2014). Interview with the Board of Directors performed in late 2012 and interview with 10 members and AFEDES technical staff in 2014.

We held technical trainings, established business plans, verified costs and raw materials, performed inventories, and implemented marketing strategies. Nevertheless, when we began issuing loans the relationships between members suffered. This was due to the fact that political participation was linked to loan issuance and there was a penalty for not attending meetings. Hence, women would attend AFEDES meetings out of interest in loans and fear of having to pay penalties. Often they were not able to pay their member fees; many members stopped attending as a result. One of the reasons why women could not pay, discovered during systematization of the experience, was the violence they suffered at the hands of their husbands. Another factor worth mentioning is that many women have said during workshops that they joined AFEDES because it provides a space for self-care, release, and self-knowledge, that it is important to continue creating spaces that can provide women with peace of mind.

*Later on we realized the importance of promoting women's rights, which were violated constantly and at every level. Thus, it was necessary for us women to begin to recover our self-esteem, learn about our rights, and stop violence against women. This is how we began to work to secure our freedom and autonomy. At the same time, we established economic undertakings through loans and savings, and technical and entrepreneurial training.<sup>2</sup>*

Another line of work was the possibility to export products made by our members. This involved changes to our work and the way in which we prepared our products. The implementation of neoliberal policies eliminated corn, bean, and vegetable farming and the cultivation of any products for self-consumption. Attempts at producing the desired products for export led to such a change in farming practices. Due to financial needs, we used to grow green beans, peas, and blackberries. As time went on, we realized that the work was very poorly paid, had low quotas and requirements, and involved high levels of debt to create the opportunity to export these products.

Later we established a basic production line for the women's work, used a technique dubbed *the clock*, and witnessed the long days—of between 14 and 16 hours—worked by each woman. This transformed our discourse. We brought visibility to our work and its contributions to the national economy, which, despite not being paid, generates large amounts of profit. These changes enabled us to highlight problems such as economic dependence, lack of autonomy, abuse, invisibility, and violence against women.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Written by Milvian Aspuc. "Cambiando hacia el Utz' K'aslemal," 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Standardization: "Recorriendo el caminos, hilamos nuestra historia y entretejemos resistencia" (2011)

In 2002, the approval of the Development Council System Act, Agreement No. 11-2002, improved women's participation in decision-making spaces. AFEDES, through its political advocacy work, provides training workshops to encourage women to become involved in these spaces and enable them to obtain the necessary information. This law provides us with the protection needed to participate at all levels of the Development Councils. Through the years and with the participation of the Municipal and Community Councils, we attained representation for the Sacatepéquez department in the COCODE. We had many achievements, such as the request for the Holistic Care Center for Women in Sacatepéquez, the social audit of the application of the budget for women's issues, and the monitoring of approved projects in that representative body. As a result of this experience, we set to expose chauvinism and how sexist and racist practices presented obstacles to participation and advocacy during decision making in our communities, municipalities, departments, and at a national level.

For Kaqchikel women, textiles are part of their life and worldview, a way to tell our stories. Another important development in 2005 was the promotion of activities that would enable the recovery of weaving skills. Young women learned to weave and older women imparted their wisdom. A group of 105 weavers was formed, which led us to open a yarn store that remains open today. We worked with this group to recover the practice of generating income through the sale of textiles, traditional shirts (*güipiles*), bags (*morrales*), and cloth.

We found meaning in the symbols used in traditional shirts, which form part of the recovery of the memory, ancestral practices, and history of Kaqchikel women. We opened weaving schools to recover and teach weaving traditions, and investigated the various symbolisms used in Santo Domingo Xenacoj and Santiago Sacatepéquez. Nevertheless, we were not able to obtain much information on the latter. In San Antonio Sacatepéquez, young people have almost stopped wearing traditional shirts and cloth, and no longer practice weaving. Traditional shirts are not being worn due to their high cost, therefore, we worked with schools to implement a weaving process that includes only a few figures, which lowered its price. This is how, little by little, more women have been able to wear traditional shirts, cloth, and sashes, and value weaving.

In 2006, we performed a participative appraisal of AFEDES's women. Through it, we discovered that 83% were members because of the loans and technical training, and only 10% because they wanted to improve themselves as women. We achieved another quantitative leap for the organization and continued promoting women's political participation in the Development Council system and the processes for promoting and publicize women's leadership. Jointly with the Women's Sector political network, we established the School for Political Education, which contributed to women's information and consultation systems. We realized that we form part of political movements.

*We spoke about the importance of redirecting the credit portfolio towards projects that help women seek their economic autonomy, with the aim of departing from capitalist logic. Nevertheless, this change led to the departure of many members. the project to increase bank usage in the communities gained momentum and many financial entities offered loans to the women without additional commitments. This decision also increased default rates. In response to this problem, we did not take the necessary measures, nor did we design a transition strategy, for which AFEDES paid a high price in both organizational and financial terms.<sup>4</sup>*

Starting in 2006, we began to speak about a solidarity, communitarian, and peasant-farmer economy, of sustainable agriculture. The process of changing the starting point in frugal circumstances lasted approximately of two years for AFEDES. We realized that the process of a capitalist economy transfers to a community and peasant-farmer context without questioning power relationships or transforming structures. We began to speak of fair trade, about women's problems with respect to productive projects. There had not been any changes, any shift in conditions, and impoverishment continued. This led us to other approaches, other knowledge, while our rapprochement with ASPM introduced us to feminist economics. We now speak of a solidarity economy and sustainable agriculture that originates from us. We try to change production ideas, views of the economy, and a review of our lives as indigenous women in order to redirect our work towards agriculture. this is why little by little we reduced our members' relationship with loans.

The result was the increased absence of members, from 710 in 2006, to 70 in 2014. This led to another discussion to differentiate between users and members, where the first were only involved with loans and the second were involved politically in the Association. The goal of discussion was to improve the relationships between members and make decisions regarding work methodologies.

*Given this challenge, we decided to act in accordance with our new way of thinking and political approach, which was related to our path towards a "new economy" (or, rather, the recovery of our grandparents' ancestral practices, which today is called food sovereignty). This was all captured in our 2007-2012 Strategic Plan. We immediately decided to adopt a path towards organic agriculture supported by training on the solidarity economy and, later, through a feminist economics approach that calls into question gender-based division of labor. Later, we began to talk about economic alternatives that foster resistance and income-generating initiatives<sup>5</sup>.*

In 2015 we held the first training on feminist economics, about the possibility to speak of an economy based on us and increased freedom and autonomy.

We thought about what we wanted and agreed upon the transformation of power relationships, and a more anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-colonial vision. Feminism helps us

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4 Ibid

5 Ibid

understand the power relationships that influenced the lives of women and indigenous women. We are realizing that if we don't work to eradicate the patriarchy, neither the structures nor our living conditions will change. It provided us with a different idea of what it is to be a woman and about how we view indigenous women. Along with Mesoamerican Women Struggling for a Dignified Life (“Mesoamericanas en Resistencia por una Vida Digna”), we have reflected upon the need to de-colonize our being and thinking. Hence, as AFEDES, we now embrace the idea that the future already was and had an environmental significance and a profound way of loving life. This enables us to think that we are not looking for new economies, but rather to rescue ancestral production, trade, and consumption practices that are environmentally friendly so as to not continue to erode our livelihoods. To think about *Utz k'aslema*.

Currently, AFEDES has a framework that includes all the knowledge and wisdom of the various approaches in order to structure their new strategic plan, where we speak of physical, financial, and political autonomy, and of the web of life.

**Utz' K'aslema, “A good life”**



## II. Description of the Organization

AFEDES is a non-profit organization with the corresponding legal responsibilities. Its structure is based on 8 community, local, and municipal groups—which have their own Board of Directors—and 70 members. There is a General Assembly where two representatives from each group participate in decision making and electing the central Board of Directors every two years.

During the 17th Ordinary Assembly of 2011, the following member characteristics were agreed upon:

- *Active women*
- *Women of all ages (young and old) Members of the Board of Directors must be of age (this is part of the regulations)*
- *Women who reside in the department of Sacatepéquez*
- *Women committed to women's struggles*
- *Responsible women*
- *Women who share their organizational and productive experience with other groups*
- *Women who are willing to become educated*
- *Women who are willing to contribute their time*
- *Transparent women*
- *Women who are interested in organizing themselves and have an idea of how to work in a group*
- *Non-political, non-partisan women<sup>6</sup>.*

### **AFEDES Women's Group**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Village</b>	<b>Group</b>
1.	Santiago Sacatepéquez	Municipal capital	Mujeres Construyendo un Nuevo Amanecer ("Women building a new dawn")
		Pachalí Village	Renacer ("Reborn")
		San José Pacul Village	Nueva Esperanza ("New Hope")
2.	Sumpango	El Rejón Village	Flor del Rejón ("Flowers of El Rejón") women's group
		Santa Marta Village	Unnamed
3.	Santo Domingo Xenacoj	Municipal capital	Comité de mujeres Arcoíris ("Rainbow")
4.	Antigua Guatemala	San Mateo Milpas Altas Village	Las Margaritas ("The Daisies") Group
		Buena Vista Hamlet	Vida y Esperanza ("Life and Hope")
5.	San Antonio Aguas Calientes	San Andrés Ceballos	San Andrés Group
6.	Inter-municipal		Colibrí ("Hummingbird") Collective

Source: Prepared by AFEDES

## MISSION

We are an organization of mainly Mayan women from the Sacatepéquez department who stand against all forms of oppression against women. We promote women's rights within society through transformational processes and egalitarian relationships amongst men and women that affect our lives at a personal, family, community, and organizational level. Our approach promotes women's influence, autonomy, and emancipation to enable the development of a full and dignified life.

## VISION

To be a pacesetter women's organization within the communities, governmental and non-governmental institutions, and the social movement; in the grassroots development of a full life for women; for our development of a new way of thinking that supports democratic, egalitarian, and inclusive relationships within a framework of coexistence with the environment that puts an end to inequality, exclusion, racism, and violence against women.

*We prepared the 2013-2018 Strategic Plan to develop our mission and vision. AFEDES' main goal is to transform women's reality through a change in thinking and ideology, based on our own principles and values, taking account of our ethnic, cultural, and cosmogonical diversity.<sup>7</sup> Base on this goal, we have established 4 strategic objectives<sup>8</sup>:*

- 1. Contribute to increasing the levels of bodily autonomy of the women of AFEDES through information, education, prevention, training, and counseling regarding women's rights and the right to comprehensive health, so that they may make conscious decisions that enable them to live a life free of violence.*

The relevant work areas are training processes, holistic health, sexual and reproductive education, and prevention and awareness-raising against violence against women.

- 2. To promote women's development based on a solidarity economy approach and the women's vision through educational activities, earnings, nutritional improvements, and economic policy proposals intended to increase their autonomy and food sovereignty.*

The work areas included in this objective are ideological and political education regarding women's economic rights and land; training and awareness-raising of women, young people, children, and husbands regarding the economic rights of women, economic proposals, and territorial defense; specialized training in sustainable agriculture for agricultural production; sustainable comprehensive production at individual and collective levels; income generation; commercialization (bolster las productive networks and market management for AFEDES' member families); promote the consumption of local products to improve the local economy; create an economic community amongst women; political advocacy to position the solidarity economy and women's economic rights and land defense; and protection of community aquifers.

- 3. Improve women's political participation in decision-making forums through organization, education, and advocacy targeted towards political autonomy.*

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<sup>7</sup> AFEDES, 2013-2018 Strategic Plan.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

We will work towards this strategy by promoting women’s organization and participation; political and ideological initiation process for new AFEDES members and follow-up for current AFEDES members; political alliances with women’s and related groups; AFEDES’ political positioning; political, ideological-organizational, methodological, and specialized-administrative education of AFEDES’ women; formal education for children, young people, and adults with a focus on women’s rights, indigenous people, and agroecology; political advocacy through the Urban and Rural Development Councils to monitor women’s strategic agenda at the community, municipal, departmental (Sacatepéquez), and national levels.

4. *Implement a management system that guarantees the technical, political, administrative, financial, and sustainable efficiency and efficacy of AFEDES.*

### **Principles and Values**

AFEDES deems it important to guide its work according to principles and values that are consistent with its worldview and political transformation. Hence, they have decreed the following:

<b>Principles<sup>9</sup></b>	<b>Values</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women and women’s rights are at the center of our work and purpose.</li> <li>• Develop an attitude that helps us provide quality, efficient, and affective service.</li> <li>• Reject all forms of discrimination: misogyny, exclusion, racism, and violence.</li> <li>• Parity, harmony, balance, and complementarity amongst human beings and nature.</li> <li>• Consistency between what we think, say, and do, in accordance with our principles.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To act with a sense of transparency, social responsibility, social justice, and commitment.</li> <li>• To share responsibility and cooperate as a team.</li> <li>• To respect and recognize individual and collective processes without discounting them.</li> <li>• To respect, recognize, and value leaders who promote human rights.</li> <li>• To assume responsibility for our mistakes.</li> <li>• To remain loyal to our institutional principles and objectives.</li> <li>• To retain autonomy and freedom of action and decision in everything we do.</li> </ul>

AFEDES has, for many years, gained experience and developed its own work methodology based on the participation of all its members. This methodology promotes training and education, so that the organization between women, and between people in the communities, may improve every day. These skills are:

- An analysis of reality
- Participation and horizontality
- Self-awareness/acknowledgement of self-knowledge
- In-depth analysis/theorizing
- A basis in women's lives

The work team is supported by the Board of Directors and performs the necessary tasks to ensure the sustainability of the Association. There are four programs: Political Advocacy, Economic Development, Institutional Improvement, and now a new program in Holistic Health, Alternative Healthcare, and Psychosocial Care.

After reviewing the organization's work, we have come to think that our greatest success has been to improve the relationships between ourselves, amongst women. We have tried with outside help [*sic*] and we believe that it is necessary to continue aiming towards de-structuring power relationships and hierarchies between women and, thus, improve our relationships to enable a transformation.

*During AFEDES' systematization in 2011, the re-structuring problems were described by ... [sic] Previous efforts were the responsibility of the Technical Team and the main Board of Directors, which had to adapt to face the new challenges involved, stop operating based on credit, and aim towards improving women's organizations, promote the participation of women in leadership positions, and monitor the political education of women members. This collectivity has to be much more centered on improving community groups, work on changing the identity and vision associated with AFEDES, and support the enhancement of women's leadership<sup>10</sup>.*

One of our achievements has been to integrate each task, each piece of knowledge, on all of our work. Each piece forms part of a whole, which is the basis of the Mayan worldview.

Currently, we are sought after for loans, textiles, and assistance regarding violence against women. The community knows that we work to defend the lives of women through different approaches. We have reassembled our knowledge and shared spaces for dialogue amongst community members. We organize ourselves as women, neighbors, and into various groups such as the Women's Sector Political Network (APSM), which helps us relate to each other to weave our *Ut'zi Laj K'aslemal*.

In the municipal and national realms, there is a different kind of relationship; the goal is to influence decision making at the municipal and national levels. These spaces require a greater effort to forge relationships between institutions, communities, organizations, churches, etc.

because there are a different points of view, worldviews, and reasoning In contrast, agreements regarding political organization originate from a more perverse perspective within the system. Changing the structures of corruption, power relationships, relationships where there is abuse and mistrust, and oligarchic and military interests begins to seem utopian.

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10 Standardization: "Recorriendo el caminos, hilamos nuestra historia y entretejemos resistencia" (2011)

### III. Background

Sacatepéquez is a Kaqchikel Mayan territory that is composed of 16 municipalities that rely on oral history to preserve their culture and on agricultural land to produce all kinds of vegetables, corn, beans, and peas. Women weavers who create memories and colors through their traditional shirts and cloth. Musicians, painters, traders. Its lands are full of volcanoes, mountains, hills, and rivers.

Its political organization is based on municipalities, development councils, fraternities, committees, organizations, and indigenous authorities in rural and urban areas. Its economy is based on agriculture, weaving, tourism, and trade. Several religions coexist there. Each municipality has annual festivals.

Historically, it has been a region subjected to violence and war, which seriously harmed life in the communities due to frequent forced military conscription of the indigenous population, massacres, and the militarization of the region. Today, the result is a militarized culture where the population feels secure through military bases and armed men.

Another major problem is racism, which is practiced by the department's mestizo population (*ladinos*) and at a national level and harms the living conditions of the majority of the population. Racism permeates the relationships between Kaqchikel Mayans and mestizos. This has an influence on political organization, the economy, and social conditions, and in national as well as local decision making. The permanent cultural assimilation (*ladinización*) promoted by the government throughout all of Guatemala has affected Sacatepéquez; it has been an attempt to permanently erase our Kaqchikel Maya culture and homogenize into becoming the ideal population of neoliberal economic systems. Therefore, the political identity of Kaqchikel Mayan women is so important and powerful.

In the September 2014 memo we positioned ourselves against the violence that is increasingly present in the social relationships within the municipality and the department of Sacatepéquez:

*We would like to express our concern regarding the climate of insecurity and violence that affects the urban and rural areas of our municipality. According to the National Statistics Institute (“Instituto Nacional de Estadística,” or INE), rural areas report some 73% of all criminal acts, mostly crop theft, murders, robberies, and violence against women and girls, including sexual violence.*

*The lack of safety that our municipality faces is related to an increase in criminal acts of which, according to INE, 91% are committed by men and 9% by women. On the other hand, violent deaths are linked to the use of firearms and sharp instruments, where firearms may be handmade and illegal. The proximity of San Lucas, which is considered the most violent municipality in Sacatepéquez, has caused an increase in violence seen in Santiago that has placed it amongst the municipalities with the higher crime rate. Nevertheless, residents do not report criminal acts and become accomplices through their silence<sup>11</sup>.*

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<sup>11</sup> Memo: “La inseguridad y miedo de la población como efectos de la violencia armada en Santiago Sacatepéquez” (“Insecurity and fear among residents as a result of armed violence in Santiago Sacatepéquez”). September 2014.

Aside from violence, there is scarce access to public services such as education and health. There are few opportunities for a middle-school education. Some 94% of schools are private and there is only one public institute serving the entire municipality of Santiago Sacatepéquez. There are no secondary schools (“nivel diversificado”), so the few people who can must leave the municipality and study in a larger one, such as Antigua Guatemala, or a different department, such as Chimaltenango. This carries high transport fees and more travel time between home and school, which is why few people have this opportunity. Assistance to study at the university level is even more difficult to obtain. Few people attend the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City to seek the opportunity to pay for a private university such as Mariano Gálvez or Landívar University.

In terms of health, there are high indices of child mortality due to the scarce supply of medication and tools in the few health centers located in the department. Undernourishment is common amongst children, women, men, and the elderly. Despite being an agricultural region, nutrition levels are quite low. This is due to the economic dependence that exists in the exchange of products for cash. Agricultural work, factory work (*maquila*), trade, and weaving are paid less than the minimum wage. Hence, survival in this department—like in most of Guatemala—is a day-to-day affair that involves much scarcity of food as well as of fair conditions.

The rates of violence against women are high in all of Sacatepéquez’s municipalities. Economic, physical, psychological, and sexual violence are present in families, in the streets, and at work. According to data from the Public Prosecutor’s Office, 1,465 reports of femicide and violence against women were filed in Sacatepéquez in 2013.<sup>12</sup> According to data from the National Institute of Forensic Science (“Instituto Nacional de Ciencias Forenses” or INACIF), 138 complains were filed for sexual assault against women and 19 complains were filed for sexual assault against men. During 2013, 759 women were murdered<sup>13</sup>, 11 of them in Sacatepéquez. In 2014, 8 women were murdered: 3 with a firearm, 2 with a knife, 1 through suffocation by hanging, 1 through suffocation by strangulation, and 1 for suffocation by submersion<sup>14</sup>.

Living conditions have not changed at the core. There are problems related to land, water, food, precarious urban conditions such as drainage systems, waste management, and lack of access to resources. A vision that guarantees the operation of systems of oppression is considered a formal organizational structure. It is more important to install a high-voltage line throughout the community to generate or transport power for private enterprises than to respect the community’s decision to not allow such a line to protect the community’s health.

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12 Women’s Sector Political Network, “II Informe La violencia contra las mujeres en Guatemala: Una prioridad de la prioridad de la Política de Seguridad, 2013” (2014)

13 Ibid

14 INACIF, [http://www.inacif.gob.gt/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=97&Itemid=18](http://www.inacif.gob.gt/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=97&Itemid=18)

## IV. Some Conceptual Aspects of the Economic Alternatives for Political Resistance (AER)

*Medicine will be your food and food will be your medicine*

AFEDES places a high value on the collective accumulation of knowledge by gathering experiences, insights, and conversations. For educational activities, we have developed critical insights into reality and proposals for transformation. The following describes approaches and categories in terms of economic alternatives for [political] resistance.

1. Holistic approach: Visualizes the relationships between humans and nature to depart from the anthropocentric perspective where “man” is at the center of decision making. This approach tries to create a new way of thinking about nature and the living beings that inhabit it, an environmental ethics that is inspired by a sense of belonging and being interdependent on the community.
2. Food sovereignty: Create and recover production practices, establishing coordinated supply chains for vegetable cultivation, the recovery of natural medicine, soil conservation, the production of cleaning and personal care products, the cultivation of corn and beans, and the recovery of native seeds.<sup>15</sup>
3. Feminist economy: A point of view within this analysis that questions power relationships within social and productive issues. It informs us about women’s work and its lack of acknowledgement within the productive realm. This analysis contributes to the proposals for redistributing care work, women’s autonomy, and the transformation of the power to control.

### **Some concepts:**

*Ut'zi Laj K'aslemal or “a good life”*: It is the motivation behind our struggles and is based on the worldview of first peoples. It is where social, political, and productive relationships are free of racism, misogyny, and destruction, where each living being can relate in an egalitarian way. “Ut'zi Laj K'aslemal” involves the knowledge to live in plenty.

*The web of life* These are the connections between all the elements that form the universe and seek an equilibrium. involves caring for the web of life, for which we are all responsible, and requires creating and recovering practices that lead to this equilibrium.

*Human Element*: To work with our bodies and our life, to change our thinking, cultivate new practices that lead to profound change in our behavior. To care for the human element means to eat well, develop knowledge, relate harmoniously with each other, produce while caring for the web of life, and rest when it is needed.

*Power relationships*: This concept was incorporated into the analysis based on the feminist economy school of thought and it helped us realize how the relationships between men and women, and between indigenous and mestizo women (*ladinas*), work. Power relationships justify inequalities between social groups, which generates benefits for some and deprivation for others. These are relationships based on the power to control and a hierarchy where superiority and inferiority shape life.

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15 “Apuntes para una Propuesta Alternativa de Bienestar de las Mujeres en Sacatepéquez” (2014)

*Systems of oppression:* Patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism are related to each other, which will help dismantle each system at its core. Patriarchy generates inequalities among people classified as men and women, where the feminine is at the service of the masculine. Capitalism is the system that guarantees the commercialization of life. It generates among the entire population a dependency on money to be able to live. When linked with other systems of oppression, it ensures that most people are ready to be used as cheap labor and in the service of consumerism. Colonialism seeks to homogenize all cultures. It manifests itself as a deep racism that nullifies nations and erases their worldviews. The latter is true of all systems of oppression, which have the urge to erase all experiences and cultures that differ from the dominant culture. To understand how these systems of oppression operate helps us understand how social, economic, political, and cultural relationships function.

*Experimentation* as a work methodology, with the objective of maintaining and strengthening the peasant-farmer economy is an exercise that begins with sustainable agriculture and the development of collective knowledge. It attempts to establish a way of learning by oneself and share life's experiences with other women. Experimentation enables us to make mistakes and learn from them. It teaches us the various possibilities available to perform a given activity and helps us appropriate these processes by achieving wisdom through experience. It is essential in our search for organic practices and the recovery of ancestral knowledge. It keeps us constantly searching, investigating, and asking questions about the process. Experimentation as a way to transform.

*Violence against women* is expressed daily and eradicating it is one of the most difficult tasks. For AFEDDES, violence against women manifests itself as physical, sexual, economic, and psychological violence, a lack of opportunities, inequalities, and discrimination. It manifests itself in the blows, aggressions, and insults targeted at women. It is present in the forced service towards others. It is the penalty for not complying with "womanly duties" as defined by cultural norms. It co-opts women's freedom and autonomy.

*Distribution of caregiving tasks:* The feminist economy makes us reflect upon women's work. Caregiving, for example, is an unpaid activity that demands long hours. Women, despite generating income, are also the only ones responsible for all kinds of caregiving work in the family, that is, preparing food, washing, raising children, caring for relatives, and managing the household. This work lacks visibility and is not paid. Our proposal is to redistribute caregiving tasks among all extended family members. Involve the family in the responsibilities of each person and of collective caregiving. Distribute household chores. Food preparation and housecleaning can be collectively performed. Make the family (women and men) responsible for planting and harvesting the family vegetable garden.

*The bodies of women as territory.* For AFEDDES, it is important to recover our bodies as one more manifestation of resistance. For the systems of oppression, to co-opt our lives and bodies enables them to control and reproduce them. It is necessary to become aware of the need to check on our health, eat well, rest, and become informed of how it works and how to give ourselves pleasure. *Sexuality* is a social construct that encompasses our emotions, feelings, and biological functions, and which serves to classify us as women. It is experienced from a perspective of male power and defines femininity, hence it is necessary to recover it for ourselves.

*Exchange-trade:* The discussion regarding capitalism leads us to ponder the commercialization of life and how this is the basis for exchanging the items we produce. It is necessary to exchange and barter based on horizontal relationships and while caring for the web of life, aside from valuing our production and prioritizing our consumption over the exchange of money.

*Defense of the territory:* In these devastating systems, to care for the Earth and our bodies puts us permanently on the defensive. The defense of territory is necessary to protect ourselves from invasions by national and transnational enterprises that, without consultation, steal rivers, lakes, and land, for the benefit of a few. We defend our bodily territory to take ownership of our own life, as we are the ones who make decisions and develop our autonomy. It is a practice of resistance to recover and preserve the territories.

*The division of labor based on gender,* is the allocation of work according to gender. The tasks that must be completed are defined by the society in the sense that men are strong and work in public, and women are weak and work in private. These fallacies have organized social, economic, political, and cultural life for centuries. The gender-based division of labor dichotomizes life and burdens women with forced caregiving work and the service towards the masculine.

*Misogyny*: hatred towards women and the feminine. Ideological system that is the fundamental principle of patriarchy and the justification for a framework based on superiority and inferiority where women are inferior to men. Its structure discourages collaboration between women and encourages rivalry.

*Impoverishment*: This category describes the policy used by the systems of oppression to generate needs among social groups and depend upon hegemonic structures. It is necessary to rename it in this way to eliminate the use of the work “poor.” This analysis helped us to recognize our riches and disempower money, review our consumption and appreciate what we have.

## Concepts from the Women’s Sector Political Network (APSM)

These categories are developed by the 32 APSM organizations and intend to guide political work and women’s lives. AFEDES is a member of this alliance and shares these beliefs with other organizations.

*El buen vivir*<sup>16</sup> (“a good life”), communities where all people and living beings live according to social relationships based on cooperation, joy, respect, self-determination, autonomy, and equality, as well as duality and complementarity<sup>17</sup>. It focuses on harmonizing and connecting with life and all its elements, on recovering ancestral practices that reclaim life. It focuses on the liberty of living beings, the horizontal respect between all peoples, production and work that alleviates needs, caring for the land, caring for ourselves, and sharing responsibilities with people who live in the same house, community, neighborhood, etc. It focuses on relaxation and leisure time, creativity, romantic relationships, promoting direct communication between people involved in the family and the rest of the community, and the possibilities for performing art. We live according to *buen vivir* when we coexist in harmony with the planet and the universe.

At the same time, we named *the web of life*<sup>18</sup>—as well as *Buen Vivir*—as life’s production and reproduction process: health, knowledge, housing, social security, affection, employment, spirituality, identity, shelter, affection [sic], social relationships and relationships with other living beings.

The recovery of bartering<sup>19</sup> as an identity mechanism, as a mechanism of affection, of community solidarity that requires us to give a “use value” to what we produce. Bartering as a mechanism of resistance that de-assembles power relationships, builds more fair and equal relationships with greater freedom. However, it must be based in *abundance* and must distance itself from a welfare mindset, from “charity.”

When we speak of a “use value” we are giving value to goods and services without

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<sup>16</sup> Concept developed for “Manual, conceptos y criterios de las Alternativas Económicas Emancipadoras” (“Manual, concepts and criteria of liberating economic alternatives”). June 2014

<sup>17</sup> Principles that reclaim the worldview of Mayan women but must be followed based on the recognition of the diversity among human beings and other living creatures, as well as the ethical principles of life, not only based on reproduction. *Buen Vivir* recognizes that we must transform the inequalities that exist in the various worldviews.

<sup>18</sup> “Manual, conceptos y criterios de las Alternativas Económicas Emancipadoras” (“Manual, concepts and criteria of liberating economic alternatives”). June 2014

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

the mediation of money. In this way we obtain things, services, and goods that we do not have but that we need and we exchange them on equal terms.

We must reflect upon what products we would like to barter, why, with whom, and where. This involves thinking through the process so that it may benefit ourselves and our communities (the collective). Here, the ethical values that we promote play an important role because the goal is *Buen Vivir*, but not at the expense of ourselves and nature. That is, it is related to the things we use and are also useful to us; it must be useful to the women I am exchanging it with and must be useful to me as well. Let us recover the custom of having exchanges during parties and celebrations. For example, sometimes exchanging *atole* (processed beverage) with seeds!

*The body*<sup>20</sup> is prime territory. We care for it and respect it. It is part of who we are. It is the physical body, the mind, the development of thoughts, spirituality, feelings, decisions, positions and meditations, sexuality, personal liberation that breaks the silence. It is cared for by using medicinal plants, organic fertilizer, and seeds and family vegetable gardens for food production. It is a territory where we defend ourselves, where we also express our struggles against racism, sexism, misogyny, lesbophobia, militarism, and reproductive inequality.

The *land* is stolen from the people by capitalism in order to exploit it and it is a territory that we must recover. We establish alliances to defend our land in order to not allow the entry of national and transnational companies that destroy natural assets, forests, and fauna.

*Resistance*<sup>21</sup> is to continue to exist, to have the political capacity to face the system in a different way and in ways developed by ourselves and in accordance to our worldviews. It is to de-program in order to create a different way of seeing. Resistance is to care for others and for ourselves. It is the capacity to recover a new meaning of life that has been taken from us by colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism. It is the capacity to recover our memory, our bodies, our joy. It can take place when women trust on each other, when we break free of selfishness to generate alliances amongst ourselves.

Let us resist to defend life from the moment that water, the land, trees, seeds, our communities, and our lives are under threat. It is a way of defending our body-earth territories. We experience resistance to defend our liberty, to guide our actions towards the *buen vivir* of women and first peoples. It is a new way of feeling, thinking, and acting, as well as politically organizing and developing the women's new imaginary.

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<sup>20</sup> Concepts developed in the framework of the 2012-2018 Strategic Plan

<sup>21</sup> Concept developed for the Resistance-based Strategy. September-October 2014

## V. Major Organizational Milestones Related to Economic Alternatives for Political Resistance (AER)

The knowledge and actions that we promote as AFEDES have changed in different ways during these working years. One of the most important milestones in our organizational life has been a change of vision towards eradicating impoverishment and strengthening our autonomy based on our own income, to return to producing our own food to reduce our dependence on money with the goal of eradicating capitalism and patriarchy. From issuing loans we turned to promoting planting skills, thinking about consumption, commercializing our products locally, and properly using medicinal plants.

The following are the milestones during AFEDES's process of promoting economic alternatives for political resistance:

- **Support for an anti-capitalist solidarity economy and sustainable agriculture as a political proposal against impoverishment.**

Based on the fact that we are peasant-farmer women, women who live in rural and urban areas, whose ancestors taught us to love planting. We develop our skills to plant our crops with minimal use of chemical products. To rename the economy ourselves has changed our understanding and rebuilt our web of life.

*(2011) ...AFEDES holds technical training to support and improve the potential of women with respect to various productive activities, savings, and food sovereignty: preparation of shampoo and soap, local traditional cuisine, looms and textiles, raising of native chickens, and a pilot sustainable agriculture project are some of the most important ones. Aside from the installation of a support center for distributing raw materials for textiles and product commercialization<sup>22</sup>.*

We hold workshops and discussion groups, and we work with schools that help us analyze our options for improving our living conditions, those of our families and of our communities.

One of the benefits of sustainable agriculture are healthy products that are not tainted by fertilizers and other kinds of chemicals, which helps us improve our health. To find herbs, medicines, and vegetables in our yards is a comfort because easily obtaining food in our own gardens eases the complexity of survival.

It helps us reflect upon the recovery and preservation of our native seeds while faced by the enormous threat of transgenic seeds. We have activated exchanges amongst ourselves: seeds, twigs, advice, and experiments to cultivate the land and achieve sustainability in our lives. We have built spaces in our homes as well as in our collective plots, backyards, gardens, and others to create a space for planting.

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<sup>22</sup> Standardization: "Recorriendo el caminos, hilamos nuestra historia y entretejemos resistencia" (2011)

An idea for improving our role in sustainable agriculture is to redistribute caregiving and planting tasks. If we are not able to distribute the responsibilities within the family, among all of its members, we will have a greater work load in our life as women. One difficulty is that socially, there are critics and we are mocked for involving men in housework.

Another conclusion regarding this process is that it is still insufficient to meet the needs of the family and we need to resort to money to acquire certain foods or products. Faced with the unemployment of the husbands, we must make a contribution with money and find ourselves forced to open our own businesses making tortillas, preparing food, or selling at the market. It is an unresolved debate to keep questioning the use of money and the financial system that pushes us around constantly to depend on it and not withdraw from the economic system.

Some of the women began alone but little by little, through workshops held by AFEDES and family meetings, they have involved their children, which now perform tasks related to tending to the crops and chickens, preparing food, cleaning the house, preparing tortillas, etc.

- **Economic Alternatives for Political Resistance and Income.**

Starting with production and building a web of life has strongly shaken AFEDES' work. It means to put ourselves in a position where we slowly transform according to the crop cycles. It means to search through the collective memory for those forms that have been lost and recover ancestral practices that have an environmental rationale, which was crucial to our ancestors. Economic alternatives for political resistance enable us to re-generate, to re-live.

These alternatives include and are part of the disassembly of the systems of oppression; they are anti-patriarchal, anti-racist, and anti-commercialized. We are discovering what it means to be indigenous, peasant-farmer, and rural women and how to develop decent living conditions. Every day we transform the power relationships amongst ourselves and in other spaces.

The income-generating initiatives are related to small "businesses" or projects that generate income based on production and commercialization of products prepared by the women. However, these are developed based on principles contrary to capitalism, that is, based on the principles of a solidarity economy.

- **New consumption and self-consumption practices:**

Based on the teaching of feminist economy we strongly criticize consumerism and basing wellbeing upon the material products that the "market" imposes on daily life. These insights enable us to change and recover ancestral practices and worldviews, to practice a different form of consumption, to first question production and the use and distribution of products and resources that are necessary to live: clothing, food, transport, education, justice, political participation, and many others. Instant soup, carbonated beverages, fried foods, and consommé have been the main products that we have stopped consuming, which has been a difficult awareness-raising process.

- **To experiment with production processes and an attempt at organic methods**

Since AFEDES changed its vision and mission, we have promoted family vegetable gardens and have developed a methodic way to improve our production; it involves *experimenting* to test whether a factor improves production and takes into account our consumption and self-care. It also prompted learning exchanges among ourselves. While observing the proceedings, we opened a discussion forum for exchanging experiences and thus improve production.

We have experimented with:

- Shampoo
- Liquid soap
- Soap balls
- Berry wine
- Farmyard animals
- Mixed crop system
- Plating in confined spaces
- Medications

Based on these observations, practices, and our knowledge, we develop a collective knowledgebase and vary all the factors in order to continue adapting organic production to our needs and worldview (without damaging the environment, but while meeting our needs).

- **Recovery of medicinal plants**

Family vegetable gardens contain between seven and eight different medicinal plants. Now know how to apply to heal ourselves without using chemical medications. This involves researching the properties of each plant and knowing how our bodies work. Aside from using them ourselves—as part of the experimentation—we share this knowledge with our colleagues, neighbors, and family members. It is a collective line of work; the learning exchanges and plants offer us connections amongst ourselves and registering these plants is a gift from our work.

- **Redistribution of caregiving tasks and relationship with the family**

The trainings and workshops have achieved ideological changes among some of the husbands and children. Their participation enables them to hear the reasons why this benefits our families. This opened a communication channel with the various family members and an insight as to why each person must be responsible for his/her care and collective care. It is a slow process and it involves problems and discussions, often with husbands, children, and—above all—mothers-in-law. It makes a big impact for men to begin to perform this type of work and mothers-in-law attempt to prevent it. We know that we want to distribute the tasks, to teach and delegate responsibilities among the family and to achieve a more collective approach.

- **Healthcare center and medicinal plants. Self-care and psychosocial care. “Rachoch ri utzilaj K'aslemal.”**

This is a new line of work that we promote based on training and the development of skills related to medicinal plants. We were able to open a health center where we serve members of the community. We want to promote self-care among ourselves and others, the importance of being healthy and taking a holistic approach to achieve it based on our worldview as Kaqchikel Mayan women. This center will help collectivize our knowledge and benefit those who visit it.

- **Reflection for exchange, trade, and commercialization**

For some time now, we have taken the time to reflect upon how we would like to design exchanges, bartering, and commercialization. We want it contribute to developing horizontal and autonomous relationships, to transform reality. We have faced bartering but do not yet know how to do it well and under which collective agreements. It is a challenge amongst other pending tasks in our organization. Bartering was an important task for Mayan cultures and many of the first peoples in the *Abya-Yala* lands. It is necessary for us to recover these ways and attempt to dismantle the commercial relationships of the neoliberal market. We want it to be based in our worldview, where water, air, earth, and the heart of the fire is part of our relationship and exchange.

- **Our traditional shirts, cloth, sashes, and textiles**

The recovery of the use of our traditional shirts (*güipiles*) is a priority for our organization. To recover its history, the ways of making them, and the numerical thinking that it involves. This contributes towards eradicating shame, racist relationships imposed upon us for being indigenous women, and using our symbols with dignity and strength. Investigating the symbols in each traditional shirt involves reconstructing the local histories and social practices, and listening to our grandmothers' stories in the communities.

#### **Difficulties for implementing the AER:**

- Lack of land
- Women cannot make decisions regarding the home, men make them.
- Not all seeds germinate.
- Climate change: lack of water, it costs too much to maintain the vegetable garden  
The current drought
- Crop theft, when the lands are far from home we cannot plant because our crops are stolen
- Capitalist consumerist thinking; progress is not made because the family does not want to change. When families are not involved, the process does not make progress. The constant bombarding by the media, schools, communities, and government.
- Individualist thinking. This proposal requires changing from seeing the world to interacting with the world.
- Little availability for working collectively
- We need an amaranth mill.
- Begin with small tasks and revive collective work. It is necessary to see the implications of collective production. The value of each one's production—we have not discussed this as we are at the stage of planting and harvesting.

## VI. Lessons Learned

- \* Continue working the AER collectively to be able to change the structures and promote this proposal as a collective.
- \* Establish how to barter to stop competing with each other and valuing what we produce in terms of money. To reflect about the use value and the value of bartering.
- \* We still need to analyze consumption in terms of each woman and not so much in terms of the family. That is, we do not give ourselves priority...
- \* Now we can see the work that we do, but we still need practice resting; we continue to work a lot and we need to review how we spend our time. This involves the redistribution of tasks and responsibilities, it involves a negotiation with everyone, to let go and let be.
- \* We need to recover good ancestral practices that consider that the future already was.